

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-20

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00

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ACDA-19 IO-14 AID-20 PC-04 DRC-01 /156 W

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P R 132110Z DEC 73

FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2106

INFO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

AMEMBASSY BRASILIA

AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN

AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN

USCINCSO

/DIA WASHDC

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 1 OF 2 CARACAS 10690/1

USCINCSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, VE

SUBJECT: VENEZUELAN ELECTIONS: AN INITIAL ASSESSMENT (REPORT
NO. 10.)

REFERENCE: A. CARACAS 10437; B. CARACAS 10684

SUMMARY: THE IMPRESSIVE PRESIDENTIAL VICTORY OF ACCION DEMOCRATICA'S
(AD'S) CARLOS ANDREZ PEREZ, THE "POLARIZATION" OF THE VOTE TOWARD
AD AND COPEI, AND THE POOR SHOWING OF THE LESSER PARTIES STAND
OUT AS IMPORTANT RESULTS OF THE VENEZUELAN ELECTIONS. A DE FACTO
TWO-PARTY SYSTEM APPEARS TO HAVE EMERGED, WITH A CLEAR
MANDATE FOR THE WINNING PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE AND HIS PARTY FOR
THE FIRST TIME SINCE THE BETANCOURT ADMINISTRATION. THE DEMON-
STRATED TECHNICAL FAILINGS OF THE SUPREME ELECTORAL COUNCIL (CSE)
ARE MUCH LESS IMPORTANT THAN ITS ROLE AS THE IMPARTIAL ARBITER
OF THE ELECTORAL PROCESS AND THE PATIENT, CIVIL CONDUCT OF THE
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ELECTORATE. END SUMMARY.

1. THE ASTOUNDING MARGIN OF VICTORY OBTAINED BY CARLOS ANDRES PEREZ AND AD, THE "POLARIZATION" OF THE VOTE BETWEEN AD AND COPEI, AND THE VIRTUAL DEMISE OF THE SMALL PARTIES OF THE RIGHT AND LEFT STAND OUT AS THE MOST SALIENT RESULTS OF THE VENEZUELAN ELECTIONS OF DECEMBER 9. THE EMBASSY AND ALMOST ALL LOCAL OBSERVERS EXPECTED A CLOSE CONTEST BETWEEN AD AND COPEI, BUT NO ONE, NOT EVEN THE MOST MILITANT ADECOS, FORESAW A VICTORY BY PEREZ AND AD OF THE MAGNITUDE INDICATED BY THE ELECTION RETURNS. AT THE SAME TIME COPEI HAS INCREASED ITS SHARE OF THE VOTE SUBSTANTIALLY (AS COMPARED TO 1968), SO THAT THE TWO MAJOR PARTIES HAVE OBTAINED AN UNPRECEDENTED 85 PCT OF THE PRESIDENTIAL VOTE, THUS CONSTITUTING, DE FACTO, A TWO-PARTY SYSTEM. THE BIG LOSERS IN THE ELECTIONS WERE THE SMALL PARTIES OF THE RIGHT AND LEFT.

2. THE AD VICTORY-TO HAVE SUGGESTED BEFORE THE ELECTIONS THAT PEREZ WOULD WIN THE PRESIDENCY WITH AS HIGH OR NEARLY AS HIGH A PERCENTAGE OF THE VOTE AS OBTAINED BY ROMULO BETANCOURT IN 1958 (49 PCT), AND THAT AD MIGHT WELL OBTAIN A MAJORITY IN CONGRESS, WOULD HAVE SUGGESTED A LACK OF KNOWLEDGE OF THE VENEZUELA POLITICAL SCENE. BUT TO THE GREAT SURPRISE OF EVERYONE, INCLUDING THE ADECOS, THAT IS PRECISELY WHAT HAS HAPPENED. OFFICIAL SUPREME ELECTORAL COUNCIL (CSE) RETURNS, WITH OVER 90 PCT OF THE VOTES COMPILED, HAVE PEREZ LEADING WITH 48.6 PCT OF THE VALID VOTES. OBSERVERS ARE STILL TRYING TO SORT OUT ALL THE INGREDIENTS THAT CONTRIBUTED TO PEREZ'S AND AD'S MASSIVE VICTORY, BUT IT APPEARS THAT THE IMPRESSIVE CAMPAIGN WAGED BY PEREZ AND THE VIGOROUS, "ENERGETIC" IMAGE HE PROJECTED HAVE BEEN PRIME FACTORS. THE VOTERS WERE APPARENTLY READY TO RESPOND TO THE FORECFUL, DYNAMIC, ABLE LEADER THAT PEREZ IS. ANOTHER MAJOR FACTOR WAS THE APPARENT MASSIVE DEFECTION OF VOTERS FROM THE MOVIMIENTO ELECTORAL DEL PUEBLO BKMEP) AND UNION REPUBLICANA DEMOCRATICA (URD) RANKS TO AD. FINALLY, AND MOST IMPORTANTLY, THE MAGNITUDE OF THE AD MARGIN OF VICTORY HAS PRECLUDED ANY THOUGHTS OF CHARGING FRAUD OR CONTESTING THE ELECTORAL RESULTS AS ANNOUNCED BY THE CSE.

3. COPEI ALSO IMPROVES ITS POSITION-THE LARGE AD MARGIN OF VICTORY HAS TENDED TO OBSCURE THAT FACT THAT COPEI HAS GREATLY INCREASED ITS PROPORTION OF THE PRESIDENTIAL AND CONGRESSIONAL VOTE IN COMPARISON TO WHAT IT OBTAINED IN THE ELECTIONS OF 1968. (ACCORD-

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ING TO THE LATEST CSE FIGURES, FERNANDEZ HAS RECEIVED 36.8 PCT OF THE PRESIDENTIAL VOTE, AND COPEI HAS OBTAINED ABOUT 30.2 PCT OF THE CONGRES-

SIONAL VOTE; COMPARATIVE FIGURES FOR 1968 ARE 29.0 PCT AND 24.2 PCT RESPECTIVELY.) THUS THE STUNNED COPEI FINDS ITSELF IN THE ANOMALOUS POSITION OF HAVING SUFFERED A HEAVY DEFEAT WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY HAVING MADE THE MOST IMPRESSIVE ELECTORAL SHOWING IN ITS HISTORY.

4. "POLARIZATION"-A SEVERE BLOW TO THE LESSER PARTIES-THE LARGE NUMBER OF SMALL PARTIES OF THE RIGHT AND LEFT, WHICH ARE THE BIG LOSERS IN THE ELCTIONS, ARE TRYING TO DETERMINE WHAT HIT THEM, SINCE THEY CONTEMPLATE MAINTAINING ONLY A SHADOW OF THEIR FORMER REPRESENTATION IN CONGRESS. THE ONE EXCEPTION IS THE MOVIMIENTO AL SOCIALISMO (MAS), WHAT HAS WON ABOUT 5.20 PCT OF THE "SMALL CARD" VOTE. THE MAS, HOWEVER, OBTAINED ONLY ABOUT HALF THE VOTE MOST OBSERVERS EXPECTED IT WOULD GET. AS FOR THE REST OF THE LEFTIST PARTIES - - THE MEP, URD, PARTIDO COMUNISTA DE VENEZUELA (PCV) AND COPEI'S

ELECTORAL ALLY, THE FUERZA DEMOCRATICA POPULAR (FDP) - - THEY HAVE SUFFERED A DEVASTATING BLOW, WHICH WILL PRODUCE GREATLY REDUCED CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATIONS FOR THESE PARTIES. THE CENTER-RIGHT AND RIGHT HAVE ALSO RECEIVED A MASSIVE REBUFF AT THE POLLS. THE INDEPENDENT MIGUEL ANGEL BURELLI RIVAS, WHO RECEIVED 220 PCT OF THE PRESIDENTIAL

VOTE IN 1968, HAS ATTRACTED LESS THAN 1 PCT OF THE PRESIDENTIAL

AND CONGRESSIONAL VOTE THIS YEAR, AS HAS THE DESARROLLISTAS PEDRO TINOCO. THE FRENTE NACIONAL DEMOCRATICO (FND) MAY NOT GAIN A SINGLE SEAT IN CONGRESS. THE PEREZJIMENISTA CRUZADA CIVICA NACIONALISTA (CCN) HAS SEEN ITS PERCENTAGE OF THE CONGRESSIONAL VOTE DROP TO LESS THAN HALF OF WHAT IT OBTAINED IN 1968, AND THE VARIOUS OTHER PEREZJIMENISTA PARTIES HAVE MADE EVEN POORER SHOWING. INITIAL ANALYSIS INDICATES THAT VERY FEW PEREZJIMENISTA VOTERS FOLLOWED THE EX-DICTATOR'S CALL FOR ABSTENTION IN THE PRESIDENTIAL VOTING.

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5. A "DE FACTO" TWO-PARTY SYSTEM-THE ELECTIONS HAVE PRODUCED A FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE IN THE ALIGNMENT OF POLITICAL FORCES IN THIS COUNTRY, IN THAT THE VOTERS HAVE, ON A DE FACTO BASIS, CREATED A TWO-PARTY SYSTEM UNDER A SET OF RULES WEIGHTED IN FAVOR OF A MULTI-PARTY SYSTEM. MANY LOCAL COMMENTATORS ARE SAYING THAT THIS PROVIDES EVIDENCE OF THE GROWING MATURITY AND SOPHISTICATION OF THE VENEZUELAN ELECTORATE.

6. A MANDATE FOR PEREZ AND AD-PEREZ'S SURPRISING NEAR MAJORITY OF THE PRESIDENTIAL VOTE, AND HIS PARTY'S VERY STRONG SHOWING IN THE "SMALL CARD" VOTING (WHICH APPEARS TO ASSURE AD A MAJORITY IN THE SENATE, AND PERHAPS THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES AS WELL), HAVE PROVIDED PEREZ WITH A MANDATE THE LIKES OF WHICH HAS NOT EXISTED HERE SINCE THE FIRST TWO YEARS OF THE BETANCOURT ADMINISTRATION. PEREZ HAS INDICATED HE WILL UTILIZE HIS MANDATE TO TRY TO PUT INTO PRACTICE HIS AMBITIOUS PROGRAM OF GOVERNMENT. HOWEVER, AT THE SAME TIME HE HAS ADOPTED A CONCILIATORY, MAGNANIMOUS STANCE TOWARD COPEI AND THE OTHER DEFEATED PARTIES, AND HAS PROMISED TO TAKE THEIR VIEWS SERIOUSLY INTO ACCOUNT IN THE CONDUCT OF HIS ADMINISTRATION.
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ANALYSES OF THE PROBABLE NATURE OF THE PEREZ ADMINISTRATION AND ITS IMPLICATION FOR U.S. INTERESTS WILL BE MADE IN SUBSEQUENT REPORTS.

7. A STRONG AFFIRMATION OF DEMOCRACY-ALL VENEZUELAN, INCLUDING THE ARMED FORCES, APPEAR TO BE TAKING GREAT PRIDE IN THE PEACEFUL, CIVIL MANNER IN WHICH THE ELECTIONS WERE CONDUCTED AND THE RETURNS RECEIVED. THE PATIENCE OF THE VOTERS IN THE FACE OF THE CSE'S SOMEWHAT INEPT HANDLING OF THE ELECTORAL PROCESS (THE REGISTRATION SNAFU, SHORTAGES OF ELECTION MATERIALS ON ELECTION DAY, SLOWNESS IN THE COMPILATION OF THE VOTE, ECT.) DESERVES COMMENDATION. THE ONLY SIZABLE PUBLIC ORDER DISTURBANCE THROUGHOUT THE ELECTORAL PROCESS WAS NOT DIRECTED AGAINST ANY POLITICAL PARTY OR THE GOVERNMENT,

BUT RATHER AGAINST THE CSE, IN PROTEST AGAINST THE DIFFICULTIES EXPERIENCED BY SOME PEOPLE IN VOTING. NEVERTHELESS, THE CSE, ABLY SUPPORTED BY THE ARMED FORCES, HAS PLAYED THE INDISPENSIBLE ROLE OF IMPARTIAL ARBITER AMONG A HIGH POLITICIZED ELECTORATE. DESPITE ITS TECHNICAL FAILINGS, ITS AUTHORITY AND FAIRNESS HAVE NOT BEEN QUESTIONED, AND THE WINNERS AND LOSERS ALIKE APPEAR TO HAVE ACCEPTED THE ELECTORAL RESULTS IT HAS BEEN ANNOUNCING AND WILL PROCLAIM.

8. CAMPAIGN WAS NOTEWORTHY FOR ABSENCE OF ANY ANTI-FOREIGN, AND
PARTICULARLY ANTI-U.S. ISSUES.
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